

A quarterly newsletter for WDVA employees

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Eastern Washington Veterans Home on the Way

State Meets Veterans' Number One Need

No longer will Eastern Washington veterans and their families be faced with the choice of moving to Western Washington or living in a community/private nursing facility, as the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs will soon be operating a veterans home in Spokane.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding between WDVA and the state Department of Social and

Health Services, the state will provide skilled nursing and assisted living care to veterans in the 102-bed facility formerly known as St. Luke's Extended Care Center in Spokane. The department is planning an August, 2001, reopening.

"Providing service to veterans in Eastern Washington has been a long time coming," said John King, WDVA Director. "For at least the last 10 years, this has been the veteran community's number one priority and we're finally going to see it through."

The idea to use St. Luke's as a veterans home

was originally proposed by Congressman George Nethercutt, R-Spokane. Nethercutt contacted federal VA officials, who then contacted the state. Several meetings with DSHS officials lead to the crafting of the MOU. Funding was then included in the state budget and legislation was passed authorizing WDVA to run the facility.

King said the new facility will not only be good for veterans, but for the agency as a whole.

"Not only do we have an additional 90 FTEs in the budget," said King, "but the dedication of staff and all of our hard work over the past four to five years has put this agency in a position where the decision makers at the state level know what a good investment we are."

The prospective new home is adjacent to a major medical campus in Spokane and within the service area of the Spokane VAMC – which will provide primary medical care and other cost savings opportunities.

"I've already been contacted by staff who are



Left to right John King, John Lee, Heidi Audette, Jim Guthrie and Don Gillespie, Assistant to Cong. George Nethercutt, R-Spokane, in front of the proposed new veterans home in Spokane.



Common Day Room

interested in being a part of this," King added. "It's a state-of-the-art facility, is very close to major health care facilities and the Fed VA, and we will be looking to fill it with state employees first."

"We couldn't have asked for a better start-up scenario."

King said getting the home filled with veterans won't be a problem either, as a recent informal survey conducted by the Spokane VA Medical Center showed

at least 100 veterans occupied community nursing home beds in the Spokane area. During the 2000 calendar year alone, Spokane VAMC discharge planners placed 78 veterans into Medicaid beds in just the Spokane area.

"Seldom do good policy and good politics go together," he added, "but that's certainly the case here."

"What a wonderful opportunity for veterans, our staff and our entire agency."

Additional photos can be seen on the V-NET.

The most recent employee survey revealed a 2.89 score (out of a possible 5) that the communication process at WDVA is effective.

What will you do to improve the communication process at WDVA?



We need to stay connected, and one of the best ways to do that is to act on the recommendations from our line staff. We do that with our veterans community and it's a process that works.

– Director John King



"With the new communication tools now available – such as the V-Net and employee newsletter – I think all staff should be more responsible in making themselves aware as to what's going on within the agency."

– Deputy Director
John Lee



"Both management and staff need to make a concerted effort to communicate and establish individual connections — one-on-one or through small group interaction at the workplace. Mass communication covers the large bases; individual communication develops relationships and trust."

– Assistant Director
Alfie Alvarado-Ramos



"Managers and supervisors need to be more aware of their role in communicating to staff. Even though the news may not always be good, not knowing what's going on is worse."

– WSH Superintendent
Jerry Towne



"We are already using more personal ways to communicate, such as monthly Brown Bag lunches, informal chat sessions and posting more information on employee bulletin boards."

– WVH Superintendent
Bob Jones

@ WDMA

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Calendar of Events

May 21
Moment of
Remembrance
Candlelighting
Ceremony
Noon
The United
Churches
Olympia, WA

May 25
Central Office and
Vet Services
Staff Recognition
Celebration –
Olympia Golf &
Country Club
11:30 a.m.

May 28
Memorial Day
Retsil Program
9 a.m. Auditorium
Orting Program
2 p.m. Chilson Hall

June 9
Tahoma National
Cemetery
Volunteers
Recognition
Ceremony
WSH - Orting
11 a.m.

July 4th
Celebrations Orting
and Retsil
Open to the public

July 21
Korean War
Memorial
Wreathlaying
Ceremony
11 a.m.
Capitol Campus
Olympia

@ The Soldiers Home

CREATIVE TEAM KEEPS
ORTING GOING AND
GOING AND GOING.....

Maintaining a well-run facility – whose oldest building was constructed in 1917 – takes time and ingenuity. Add to that the needs and well-being of the residents and staff, and you will find a dedicated, caring team of individuals who comprise Plant Operations at Orting.

Facilities manager Bill Arthur leads a small team of dedicated professionals providing residents with all the basics needed for comfort – heat, water and plumbing – as well as the aesthetic requirements that help make the facility comfortable and pleasant.

“Our team is very creative about adapting to requests from staff and residents,” said Arthur. “We share information and involve the team in all major projects.”

One example of their creativity can be seen in the facility’s new “garage” for heavy equipment. Until recently, this was a water storage tank needing replacement due to age and deterioration. Rather than dismantling and disposing of the tank, electrician Jack Boone came up with the idea to convert it to a garage.

In addition to Boone, team members include carpenter Mike Yandle – also the facility locksmith and back-up plant manager; mechanic Greg McKernan – plumber, steam-fitter, water tester, and responsible for keeping the kitchen equipment running; painter Leo Reda – whose world these days is filled with Eden concept colors; and stationary engineers Craig Lamotte, Duane Rossi, Robert U’ren and James Redle – responsible for boiler operations, the mechanical rooms, heating systems and steamfittings. Jim Fitzgerald handles general repair.

Gardeners Keith Moores and Martin Freitas maintain and mow 45 acres on campus – plus a seven-acre cemetery – including digging the graves, handling the interments and pouring the headstones. From May to December, gardener Jay

Anderson assists with maintaining the greenhouse and the fishing pond.

Although each member of the team has specialized duties, Arthur said their willingness to cross-train in other areas is prevalent.

“This willingness was especially evident during the recent earthquake,” said Arthur. “Each employee was able to provide emergency back-up and ensure our residents received the highest quality of services in a timely manner.”

In between the day-to-day requirements of keeping a facility this size running, Arthur said they are always ready for the multitude of inspections that come their way. In addition to the annual VA and Medicaid inspections, they have received the approval of the fire marshall, the Department of Health, and Labor and Industries. Helping keep all the paperwork straight for these inspections is office assistant, Stephanie Santos.

Arthur – a certified Water Distribution Manager – has the added responsibility of monitoring and performing all needed tests for the water system supplying the entire campus. Arthur’s certification has eliminated the need to hire a water manager and provided opportunities for team members to learn the intricacies of water management.

Medical transportation for residents also comes under the heading of plant operations. Two full-time drivers – James Rucshner and Tim Wilkins – transport daily to the VA hospital in Seattle and American Lake, as well as local runs for private doctor appointments. They travel more than 3,000 miles a month. CNA Kay Alfred either accompanies the residents – as needed – or works in the skilled nursing unit.

Intermittent drivers Jim Aho and Donald Miller handle recreational trips as



Some of the Orting Plant crew stand in front of the outdated water tank recently transformed into a garage for heavy equipment. L to R Jack Boone, Stephanie Santos, Bill Arthur and Mike Yandle.



well as filling in for vacations and sick leave.

Keeping the buildings and grounds at Orting a truly beautiful and functional “place to call home” can be summed up in two words, according to Arthur: “Teamwork and innovation.”

Additional photos can be seen on the V-Net.

Orting Facts

- 38 buildings
- Oldest built in 1917
- 512,807 square feet of buildings
- 188 acres includes, 7-acre cemetery and fishing pond
- Medical drivers travel more than 3,000 miles per month
- Voluntary metal recycling brings more than \$500 annually to Orting general fund
- New water storage tank holds 6-7 day supply of water
- Orting’s lahar siren provides first-line notification, direct from Emergency Management Headquarters

Director’s; Distinguished
Service Awards handed out at
Orting

Marlene Weir, Dietary Manager at the Soldiers Home and Colony, received the Director’s Award.

Norma Urquart, Human Resource Consultant, and Joanna Curley, Social Worker, received Distinguished Service Awards.

Receiving Years of Service awards:	
Anette BonEske, Nursing Service	25 years
Ann Brown, Medical Records	20 years
James Ruschner, Plant Service	20 years
Kristine Elliott, Nursing Service	15 years
Tok Slagel, Nursing Service	10 years
Eleanor Dorrello, Nursing Service	5 years
James Boyd, Nursing Service	5 years
Ruth Harris, Dietary Service	5 years
Jack Boone, Plant Service	5 years
Estela Ongoco, Nursing Service	5 years
Marilyn Harper, Nursing Service	5 years



Marlene Weir,
Food Service Manager



Norma Urquart, HR Asst.



Joanna Curley,
Social Worker

@ The Veterans Home

PT/OT Moves them

Providing independence for residents – through physical and occupational therapy – takes patience, persistence and a great deal of encouragement according to RN Restorative Coordinator Kitty Phillips.

The positive results of the stimulation of muscles – through a variety of machines and exercises – keep a constant flow of residents arriving for their sessions.

“Veterans are a hardy breed who don’t give up easily,” said Phillips. “Here at Retsil, you see a lot more attempts at independence than at some of the private care facilities.”

The PT/OT staff work with an average of 100 residents, three-to-five times per week, seven days-a-week.

Divided into three categories of therapy – physical, occupational and speech – the PT/OT program provides options for dealing with the disabilities brought by aging, health and injuries.

Physical therapy deals with muscle groups and mobility, striving to increase, restore or maintain range of motion, physical strength, flexibility, coordination, balance and endurance.

Occupational therapy addresses the functional activities of daily living, such as grooming and hygiene tasks, and includes the function of getting food to the mouth.

Speech therapy addresses the processing of food – such as an inability to chew or swallow properly – as well as speaking.

At admission, each resident is evaluated by contract physical therapist, Tom Knoebel. Coordinator Phillips then takes Knoebel’s recommendations and drafts a program for the resident, adding measurements to gauge their progress. All skilled nursing residents undergo a quarterly re-evaluation to assess changing needs.

PT Aides Tracy Shields, Sonja Hart and Gloria Rosado then work up the weekly schedules for residents’ PT sessions. Although the majority of residents attend their sessions in the PT room in building 9, those who are unable to attend, receive treatment in their rooms.

Each resident’s progress is documented and when a baseline set by Knoebel is reached, Phillips and her staff continue the therapy program, with a goal to prevent further decline in functional abilities and promote independence for the residents.

Across the hall from PT is Occupational Therapy. Certified Occupational Therapy Aide, Marie Doughty, “probably knows more about wheelchairs and what part fits where than anyone at the facility,” said Phillips. By conducting quarterly wheelchair inspections, Doughty provides maximum comfort and mobility to more than 150 residents.

When a new resident arrives needing equipment, the inventory – recycled as residents leave or pass on – is evaluated to find the right size and type. If the necessary equipment is not readily available, Doughty said she then searches her database, or turns to the federal VA, for equipment.

In addition to wheelchairs, Doughty handles proper positioning of residents in beds, issues canes and evaluates the safety of impaired residents’ surroundings.

In addition to overseeing the equipment, Doughty works with residents to maintain independence – even after strokes and other debilitating health issues. Doughty said residents can be taught alternative ways to breath, conserve energy, or deal with one-sided weakness. Twice-a-week, they can attend a special joint and muscle stretching exercise program in OT. TIP resident Bob Campbell has been leading fellow residents through this program for nearly 17 years.

Speech therapy is handled on an on-call basis by contract therapist S. K. Osborn, and often involves assisting a resident with swallowing difficulties, said Phillips.



On a typical week in PT, the Restorative Aides work with more than 100 residents.



Left: Gloria Rosado assists a resident with his range-of-motion and balance.



Right: The Restorative Services staff from left to right; Kitty Phillips, RN; Gloria Rosado, CNA; Marie Doughty, COTA; Sonia Hart, CNA; Tracy Shields, CNA..

“The intricacies of therapy – along with constant research and innovations – is continually improving the quality of life for residents,” said Phillips. “We adjust programs for each resident as their needs change and even provide for hospice residents, providing therapy that gives comfort and reduces pain.”

Resident Russ Mills probably stated the importance of this program best:

“I’m not dead yet. I like to wander and my hip is going out. Coming to therapy helps.”



Social Workers Celebrate Contributions at Retsil

March is National Professional Social Work Month

Retsil’s social work team joined The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to celebrate more than 100 years of professional social work in the United States by hosting an open house for all staff and residents at Retsil.

The March 29 open house provided staff and residents an opportunity to visit and enjoy the refreshments and decorations provided by the social work team of (left to right in photo) Brenda McCormick, Diane Benjamin, Ann Dawes and Quindola Crowley.

“This was a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge work of professional social workers – work that often is unnoticed and overlooked,” said Social Work Manager, Quindola Crowley. “For social workers, the month of March provides an opportunity to celebrate the caring and skilled professionals who help individuals, families and communities throughout our country and abroad.”

According to NASW, professional social workers are the nation’s largest providers of mental health and therapy services – in both rural and urban areas – and provide an important service by coordinating counseling services with community and environmental resources.

Where’s the Eden Room?



Remember the old smoking room in building 9? It’s been transformed into a Garden of Eden.

Thanks to the National Bowling Association donating the funds, Retsil’s staff and volunteers created a wonderful, calming Eden for residents and staff to enjoy.

Unfortunately, this photo doesn’t do it justice – you may want to visit it in person.

Vet Services Reorganized

Assistant Director Alfie Alvarado-Ramos announced a new “AAA” approach to serving Washington’s veterans, which includes a shifting of resources in WDVA’s Veterans Services Program.

“We are working diligently to put a system in place which will create a network of services that provide veterans with Awareness of Available services and Access to the right services at the right time,” said Alvarado-Ramos.

“We call it our AAA approach to serving veterans.”

For a number of years, Vet Services has operated on a three-region basis, but with the introduction of the Veterans Community Services Coordinators (VCSCs), Alvarado-Ramos said the agency needed to reconsider the regional concept.

After careful evaluation of the agency’s goals, the following changes took effect Feb. 22:

Richard Stewart will oversee the development of community networks and the orientation, supervision and performance of duties by the VCSCs, as well as the operation of the Bremerton Community Outreach Office in Bremerton.

Jim Rising will head up the statewide contract, homeless and grants programs, as well as securing and managing the funding to enhance or develop new services to veterans and their families.

Newly hired **King County Veterans Services Manager – Ric Price** – will oversee the King County homeless and incarcerated veterans programs and community outreach. Interaction with other counties in addressing veterans issues from the county perspective will also be key to this position.

While the department will be implementing the programs slowly and developing the statewide framework by making adjustments along the way, Alvarado-Ramos is confident this redistribution of resources will serve WDVA well.

Alvarado-Ramos said duties of the Veterans Estate Management, Home Admissions and PTSD Program Managers will not be changing at this time, and has committed to personally providing frequent updates to Vet Services staff and those in the field to make sure everybody is up-to-date and working in unison.

Jeff Dunn Retires



Jeff Dunn receives a photo of the WA State Vietnam Memorial at his recent retirement luncheon in Vancouver. Dunn, the most senior (10 yr) staffer with American Legion, actively participated in organizing veterans’ advocacy groups, including one that was instrumental in the development of the transitional housing program in Vancouver.



Earthquake Rocks Central Office



This photo illustrates the reason for securing file cabinets to walls. The Feb. 28 earthquake left Mac Harris’s workstation at Central Office in need of repair. Fortunately, Mac remembered to drop under his desk for cover and escaped being attached to his hat – front of photo – when the cabinets toppled.



Did You Know...

As of Jan. 1, 2001, with a rate of 29.6 percent, WDVA now has the most diverse workforce of all state agencies.

WDVA Working to Help Homeless Veterans



WDVA hosted its 2nd annual statewide convention for service providers of homeless veterans April 12th and 13th. Providers and officials from all levels of government, as well as non-profit providers, were in attendance. The convention serves as an opportunity to network, train and expand service delivery areas to reach homeless – especially rural – veterans.



Congratulations to @WDVA Editor, Colleen Gilbert, for her promotion to Public Information Officer. Colleen recently completed 12 months of training, research development and writing skills tasks in order to meet some difficult requirements for this position. This issue of @WDVA is the culmination of her work.

The continued articles and features on staff at Orting, Retsil, Field Services and Central Office will be one of her contributions to improving agency communications. She is also a valued contributor to the V-Net, the agency intranet.

Colleen is a key member of the overall agency communication process and she thoroughly enjoys her new job. Well done.

Jim Guthrie
Communications Director